



ON THE ONE HAND...

Prominent creationist critic, atheist author of *The God Delusion*, and Oxford University professor, Richard Dawkins, is writing a children's book on how to think scientifically about the world, including the 'Judeo-Christian myth.' 'I plan to look at mythical accounts of various things and also the scientific account of the same thing. And the mythical account that I look at will be several different myths, of which the Judeo-Christian one will just be one of many,' he told the London *Telegraph's* Martin Beckford and Urmee Khan. 'And the scientific one will be substantiated, but appeal to children to think for themselves; to look at the evidence. Always look at the evidence.' Dawkins said teaching children about religion at school and labeling them Christian, Jewish or Muslim from a young age was a form of abuse. Speaking at the conference of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain last year, he said, 'Do not ever call a child a Muslim child or a Christian child – that is a form of child abuse because a young child is too young to know what its views are about the cosmos or morality.'

...YET ON THE OTHER

Over at Cambridge University, meanwhile, the author of *Why Gods Persist*, Emeritus Royal Society Research Professor of Zoology, Robert Hinde, who studies 'the application of biological and psychological data to understanding the bases of religion and ethics,' says that there's a scientific reason why every human society has a code of conduct, 'legitimated, purveyed and stabilised by the religious system,' to do with what he calls evolutionary morality. Essentially, Hinde argues, we establish religious beliefs built on pre-existing evolutionary

moral patterns just as we learn to speak because we build on a pre-existing evolutionary language-learning ability.

IN OUR TIME

While Barack Obama was sworn in as the President of the United States on 20 January, there was plenty of speculation in the preceding two months about 'the transition.' At his first press conference after his November 2008 election win, Lynn Sweet, the Washington bureau chief for Chicago's *Sun-Times*, asked what he was doing to 'get ready.' 'Have you spoken to any living ex-presidents; what books you might be reading; everyone wants to know what kind of dog are you going to buy for your girls; (and) have you decided on a private or public school for your daughters?' 'With respect to the dog,' Obama answered, 'this is a major issue.... We have...two criteria that have to be reconciled. One is that (my daughter) Malia is allergic, so it has to be hypo-allergenic.... On the other hand, our preference would be to get a shelter dog, but obviously, a lot of shelter dogs are mutts, like me. So...whether we're going to be able to balance those two things, I think, is a pressing issue in the Obama household. And with respect to schools, (my wife) Michelle will be scouting out some schools.' Oh, and regarding Cabinet positions? 'I want to move with all deliberate haste, but I want to emphasise deliberate as well as haste.' Obama picked Chicago superintendent of schools Arne Duncan as his nominee for Secretary of Education.

SEXUAL ASSAULT IN SCHOOLS

School students who have experienced sexual violence are often reluctant to go to the

police, but usually disclose their experience to friends or family, according to a research review by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), which found that 14 per cent of girls and three per cent of boys aged between 12 and 20 have been sexually assaulted – the vast majority by people they know. Releasing the report, AIFS General Manager of Research Dr Daryl Higgins said peer-to-peer sexual assaults tend to be unacknowledged because they occur outside school grounds or are interpreted as being 'part of the rough and tumble of high school life.' While about 15 per cent of sexual assaults on students are reported to police, roughly two-thirds of victims tell someone in their informal support network, with those aged between 14 and 17 more likely to tell someone. 'Young people may not disclose what's happened because they know the perpetrator, fear they won't be believed or may be blamed, or because they worry about the impact of this on others and are unsure about how to negotiate safe sexual relationships,' said AIFS researcher and authors of the report Dr Antonia Quadara. 'School staff told about an assault need to support the young person, provide a safe, private environment, let the young person take their time and tell them as much or as little as they are comfortable with. Then they should be referred to the right services,' Dr Quadara said. The report also notes that new technologies like mobile phones, digital imaging and the internet contribute to creating forms of sexual violence that the law has difficulty defining as assault.

LINKS: For the full report, visit www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/wrap/w6.html

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